

Update - So how's that "catch shares" revolution working out for groundfish?

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Alternating with original FishNet USA articles I will be going back to pieces I've written (for FishNet and other outlets) over the past 19 years – isn't it amazing how fast time goes when you're having fun? - to see how accurate I was in identifying industry trends and predicting what their impacts were going to be. Rather than redistributing the original articles I'll link to them on the web and try to keep these updates to two pages or under. The original for this update from March, 2014 is at <http://www.aifrb.org/fishosophy/>

Most of you probably remember when newly appointed NOAA head Jane Lubchenco went to New England and announced that she was going to save our nation's oldest fishery. But if it didn't make a lasting impact on you, quoting from the Environmental Defense blog, EDFish by Tesia Love on April 8, 2009, "*Sally McGee, Emilie Litsinger and I got to witness something pretty wonderful today. Jane Lubchenco came to the New England Fishery Management Council meeting to announce the immediate release of \$16 million to the groundfish fishery to help move the fishery to "sector" catch share management by providing funding for cooperative research to help fishermen get through a tough fishing year with very strict limits on fishing effort.*" She went on to quote Dr. Lubchenco "*we need a rapid transition to sectors and catch shares. Catch shares are a powerful tool to getting to sustainable fisheries and profitability. I challenge you to deliver on this in Amendment 16, to include measures to end overfishing. I will commit the resources to my staff to do their part to ensure Amendment 16 is passed in June. We are shining a light on your efforts and we will track your progress. There is too much at stake to allow delay and self-interest to prevent sectors and ultimately catch shares from being implemented.*"

I'm sure that you were there with the rest of us, heaving a huge sigh of relief with visions of Dr. Lubchenco on her shiny white steed, first riding to the rescue of the New England fishery, and then on to all of the rest of our struggling fisheries. "Hyo Silver! Away!"

So how did she do? A couple of years back NOAA/NMFS released the **2012 Final Report on the Performance of the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Fishery (May 2012 – April 2013)**. It's available at <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/publications/crd/crd1401/>. The report included a table - available at <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/publications/crd/crd1401/tables.pdf> - included a table titled **Summary of major trends (May through April, includes all vessels with a valid limited access multispecies permit)** for the fishing years 2009 to 2012. The table only takes up a single page, is pretty easily understood and is well worth your consideration in its entirety but I'll take the liberty of synopsisizing what I think are the major points it illustrates. In each of the four years the groundfish revenues, landed weight, number of active vessels that took a groundfish trip, the total number of groundfish trips, and the total crew days on groundfish trips decreased. The non-groundfish revenues and landed weight increased. The days absent on a non-groundfish trip increased slightly then decreased.

And then we come to 2013 (it seems that according to NOAA/NMFS, 2014 hasn't gotten here yet). Had the myriad benefits of Dr. Lubchenco's and her ENGO/foundation cronies' Catch Share Revolution finally arrived? Apparently, not quite yet. According to the **2013 Final Report on the Performance of the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Fishery (May 2013 – April 2014)**, just about everything that was falling in FY 2009 to 2012 continued to fall in FY 2014. I won't go over any of the details, but the corresponding Table 1 for that year is available at http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/read/socialsci/pdf/groundfish_report_fy2013.pdf.

Oh well, I guess she deserves a few points for trying – and we shouldn't forget that before she could really focus on fixing groundfish she was distracted by having to dump a couple of millions of gallons of Corexit into the Gulf of Mexico.

Thirteen species are included in the New England Fishery Management Council’s multi-species fishery management plan, the “groundfish” FMP. Four of those species support no or minimal directed fisheries. The landings of those that support a significant commercial fishery are in the table below (from the NOAA/NMFS commercial landings database). Looking at these data, it’s impossible to suggest that after years of intensive management this management regime is anything that could be considered a success – unless your idea of success is putting a whole bunch of people out of work. In fact only the most charitable among us could term it anything other than disaster – and it’s a disaster that has been in the making since long before Dr. Lubchenco so fatuously announced that she was going to fix it.

(I’ll add here that catch share management is not a cure-all for all that’s wrong with fishery management - though at the time Dr. Lubchenco and her “team” apparently believed it was - nor is it the reason for management failures. It is nothing more than an option for dividing the catch among users. As such it can have profound socioeconomic impacts on participants in the fishery and on fishing communities that depend on it, but not on the fishery resources themselves.)

Species	Year	Metric Tons	Value	Species	Year	Metric Tons	Value
Atlantic Cod	2009	8946	\$25,223,364	Haddock	2009	5,818	\$13,655,842
	2010	8039	\$28,142,681		2010	9,811	\$21,715,488
	2011	7981	\$32,596,942		2011	5,709	\$16,316,219
	2012	4766	\$22,200,043		2012	1,959	\$7,833,001
	2013	2261	\$10,455,352		2013	1,869	\$6,002,480
Plaice	2009	1395	\$3,886,809	White Hake	2009	1,696	\$3,556,719
	2010	1413	\$4,498,591		2010	1,807	\$4,116,221
	2011	1387	\$4,274,757	2011	2,907	\$5,849,790	
	2012	1480	\$5,048,688	2012	2,772	\$6,933,743	
	2013	1318	\$4,688,995	2013	2,238	\$6,484,444	
Winter Flounder	2009	2209	\$8,094,381	Pollock	2009	7,492	\$10,010,039
	2010	1587	\$6,959,547		2010	5,158	\$9,529,022
	2011	2124	\$8,002,376		2011	7,193	\$12,292,573
	2012	2395	\$10,331,500		2012	6,743	\$13,185,509
	2013	2746	\$9,899,924		2013	5,058	\$11,395,943
Yellowtail Flounder	2009	1605	\$4,759,536	Acadian Redfish	2009	1,440	\$1,572,292
	2010	1318	\$4,193,981		2010	1,646	\$1,959,681
	2011	1827	\$4,762,969	2011	2,014	\$2,754,692	
	2012	1808	\$5,396,502	2012	4,035	\$5,891,429	
	2013	1278	\$4,199,927	2013	3,577	\$4,337,163	
Witch Flounder	2009	949	\$4,036,115				
	2010	759	\$3,773,526				
	2011	870	\$3,955,053				
	2012	1037	\$4,247,528				
	2013	686	\$3,735,330				

How might it be fixed? In the original FishNet article I quoted a couple of paragraphs from a National Academy of Sciences study **Evaluating the Effectiveness of Fish Stock Rebuilding Plans in the United States** (available at <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/18488/evaluating-the-effectiveness-of-fish-stock-rebuilding-plans-in-the-united-states>). I can’t think of anything more valuable than repeating those words here. On page 178 of the report the authors concluded “*the tradeoff between flexibility and prescriptiveness within the current legal framework and MFSCMA (Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act) guidelines for rebuilding underlies many of the issues discussed in this chapter. The present approach may not be flexible or adaptive enough in the face of complex ecosystem and fishery dynamics when data and knowledge are limiting. The high degree of prescriptiveness (and concomitant low flexibility) may create incompatibilities between single species rebuilding plans and EBFM (Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management). Fixed rules for rebuilding times can result in inefficiencies and discontinuities of harvest-control rules, put unrealistic demands on models and data for stock assessment and forecasting, cause reduction in yield, especially in mixed-stock situations, and de-emphasize socio-economic factors in the formulation of rebuilding plans. The current approach speci-*

fies success of individual rebuilding plans in biological terms. It does not address evaluation of the success in socio-economic terms and at broader regional and national scales, and also does not ensure effective flow of information (communication) across regions.”

In other words, the fishery managers need more **informed** flexibility to adequately manage our fisheries. It has been the goal of the fishing industry’s friends in Congress to provide this necessary flexibility (with adequate safeguards, of course). Conversely it has been the goal of a handful of foundations and the ENGOs they support and a smaller handful of so-called fishermen’s organizations to prevent this, and it seems that they have been willing to resort to just about any tactics to do it. As they have been successful in their efforts the fishing industry has continued to lose infrastructure that will never be replaced and markets that will be next to impossible to recover – and the percentage of imported seafood that we consume will continue to increase in spite of the fact that our fisheries are among the richest in the world.